

November 1, 1974

Lord Ashby, Master  
Clare College  
Cambridge CB2 1TL

Dear Eric,

By now your Committee's efforts in examining the potential problems associated with researches on recombinant DNA molecules must be well along in its appointed task. I hope that the investigative phase has gone well and that the reporting of your recommendations will be equally successful. If you think that my comments on an early draft would be useful, I'd be most willing to study your conclusions and recommendations.

For the present, though, I'd like to keep you abreast of our activities in putting together the Asilomar Conference in late February. The primary purpose of the meeting is to bring together individuals who can contribute information and expertise on the issues that have to be examined. The meeting will consider the current state of the "art", the opportunities, benefits and directions of future research and, as important, the concerns and what to do about them. It's my hope that a consensus or at least understanding of what course should be taken for the short-, intermediate- and long-term to solve the problems of safety will emerge. Undoubtedly your Committee's findings and recommendations will be most useful in that discussion and I would hope that your report will be available by late February.

At the moment the Organizing Committee is grappling with putting together the list of invited participants of the Conference. To maximize the opportunities for frank and ready discussion, we have decided to limit attendance to between 135 and 150 people. Our aim is to have about a third to half of the participants be from outside the U.S. With the help of the scientific session chairman, the Organizing Committee has put together a tentative list which already numbers 140 but this is still in flux and will undoubtedly undergo changes as new names are suggested and several are dropped.

Although the meeting is being sponsored by the U.S. National Academy of Sciences and is being funded by the National Science Foundation and the National Institutes of Health, there is no attempt being made to obtain, from the corresponding bodies of other nations, their recommendations for representation at the meeting. I believe that such requests would not have brought forth the best or most

Lord Ashby, Master  
Page Twof

contributory individuals and, moreover, we probably could not have accomodated all of the individuals that would have been suggested. But besides the working scientists we also aeed to bring people who are prominent enough to influence policy in their own national or international circles. The problem then is to invite people who are outstanding scientists who can contribute their expertise to the discussions and at the same time can influence policy decision making in their own country. As examples of such people I cite Sydney Brenner (who is a member of our Organizing Committee), two members of your committee (who are on the list of intended invitees) and an appreciable number of the people you called as "witnesses" for your study (Anderson, Murray, Cawford) and a number of other prominent scientists, from the UK. My question to you is whether you think this approach is sound. And whether there is likely to be any "ruffled feathers" if the Royal Society and MRC or other British official bodies are not sent official invitations to send representatives. If that was necessary, how could we avoid doing the same for France, Germany, Sweden etc? Any advice you could provide on this matter would be deeply appreciated. Also, if in the course of your investigation, you identified individuals that you believe should attend, I'd be very happy to receive their names: possibly, and hopefully, they have already been included in my list of names.

With best regards,  
Sincerely,

PB:af